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THE ENGLISH VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENTS

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It was in August, 1909, that Mr. Haldane, then Secretary of State for War launched his scheme for the formation of Voluntary Aid Detachments. Having reorganized the Volunteers, re-naming them Territorials, and having brought into being a Territorial Nursing Reserve, every member of which must be a three-years-trained nurse recommended by her matron, it was thought necessary, in case England should be invaded, to have bands of men and women throughout the country who, in such a time of emergency, would be able to give the wounded some slight care and attention while en route to the base hospitals. The working out of the details of this scheme was handed over to the British Red Cross Society and the St. John Ambulance Association.

The idea caught on and was taken up with avidity, as all things are when connected with war or royalty. The country people very rapidly began to form these detachments all over the country. Each county branch of the Red Cross Society is responsible for the organization and maintenance of all the detachments in the county. This is divided into areas under vice-presidents, assistant county directors, local secretaries and local committees who form and carry out all the necessary business connected with their detachments.

The qualifications necessary for membership are: for men, the certificate in First Aid, and for women, certificates in First Aid and Home Nursing. There are various exceptions made for the men's detachments and trained nurses and cooks are exempt in the women's detachments. Those without certificates are taken as probationers providing they qualify in both subjects within the year and produce the certificates of one of the various teaching bodies, such as the Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, National Health Societies, etc.

As soon as these detachments began organizing it was quickly discovered that dual control in regard to teaching brought friction. In Devonshire, for example, a trained nurse was engaged to teach the classes in Home Nursing. The St. John Ambulance Association was asked to ratify the appointment but refused to do so on the ground that they only recognized as teachers fully qualified medical practitioners, and therefore no nurse could be allowed to teach even the elements of her own work. The St. John Ambulance Association is controlled chiefly by army surgeons and the lecturers received one guinea per lecture, and often the subject is read directly from the S. J. A.

handbook to the class. This insulting and unjust condition was brought to the notice of Mr. Haldane, through a letter in the *British Journal of Nursing* and resolutions passed by some of the Nurses' Leagues, but rather than alter their ancient constitution the St. John Ambulance Association withdrew from the scheme, which is now controlled entirely by the Red Cross Society which recognizes nurse teachers and examiners and is willing to pay them the same fee as doctors but is rather more willing to pay less, but instruction in First Aid *must* be given by a doctor to candidates of both sexes.

The following are the subjects to be given. Each lecture is to be of about an hour's duration with a practice class afterwards. Incidentally lecturers are reminded to make each lesson as elementary but practical as possible.

Lecture one: regions of the body, skeleton, joints; the muscular, digestive, respiratory, lymphatic and excretory systems; first aid treatment of wounds and bruises; use of the triangular and roller bandages and the forming of hand seats. Lecture two: sprains, fractures, gunshot wounds, improvising splints, triangular and roller bandages and the fireman's lift. Lecture three: the circulation of the blood and the treatment for various hemorrhages; the use of the triangular and roller bandages and the description of stretchers. Lecture four: respiration, asphyxia and treatment of different cases of; artificial respiration, Schaefer's, Howard's and Laborde's methods; nervous system, its common affections and their treatment; stretcher practice, use of the triangular and roller bandages. Lecture five: treatment of burns, scalds and frostbites; removal of foreign bodies from eye, ear, nose, throat and stomach; management of clothes in fire and street accidents; general poisoning; preparation of bed and bed room in case of accidents; improvisation of stretchers; use of the triangular and roller bandages.

The syllabus of lectures on Red Cross Nursing is as follows: Lecture one: accommodations for sick persons; light and ventilation; care of room; use of the roller bandage. Lecture two: infectious cases, care, quarantine, disinfection; nursing in temporary shelters and ambulance trains; use of roller bandage. Lecture three: taking of pulse, respiration and temperature; clinical charts; bed making; use of the roller bandage. Lecture four: the nurse, dress, duties and rest; washing and feeding of patients; food and its digestion, absorption and excretion; use of the roller bandage. Lecture five: administration of medicines; application of poultices and fomentations; baths and their effects; use of the roller bandage. Lecture six: keeping records, dressing wounds and bed sores; making of beef tea, chicken tea, etc.; convalescence; use of the roller bandage.

Criticism of these lectures is unnecessary; their faults are too glaring. They show so well that no trained nurse was on the committee who arranged and passed them. It is difficult to realize why these people place such importance on the knowledge of the use of the roller bandage. If only probationers could absorb all this in twelve hours' instruction what a blessed relief it would be to their ward sisters.

Naturally at the end of each course of these lectures there is an easy examination which, having passed, the probationer may now become a full-fledged member of the V. A. D. Each detachment is composed of a commandant (man or woman) who is responsible for the efficiency of the detachment; a medical officer who takes part in the training of the detachment and in time of war takes charge of the sick and wounded; a lady superintendent who must ordinarily be a three-years'-trained nurse, but exceptions can be made to this rule, she is in personal charge of the nurses and is responsible for their discipline and efficiency; a quartermaster (man or woman) who has charge of buildings, equipment, stores and all materials, also command of the cooks, cooking, etc.; twenty women, of whom four should be qualified as cooks.

Every detachment is subject to military discipline and inspection and is required to maintain discipline and efficiency and to conform to such rules, regulations and orders as may be issued from time to time by the War Office, Red Cross Society or County Director. Members are requested to wear some distinctive badge or article of dress to distinguish them from the members of the civil population. This they have carried out with marvelous thoroughness, for they wear Red Cross armlets, huge Red Crosses on the front of their aprons, badges on hats, collars and cuffs, etc., so they are not likely to be mistaken for members of the civil population. Uniform is optional but can be obtained from the Red Cross Society for two pounds, badges are also supplied for from one shilling to thirty shillings, sixpence.

Their duties as quoted from the War Office scheme are:

The women's detachments would be employed chiefly in forming military rest stations, for preparing and serving meals and refreshments to sick and wounded during transit by railway and in taking temporary charge in the evacuation stations or temporary hospitals of severe cases unable to continue on the journey. They should therefore be trained not only in the cooking and preparation of diets but also in the method of arranging small wards for patients in suitable buildings, preferably near a railway station, and in such nursing as is necessary for the *temporary* care of patients until they can be transferred to the general hospitals. Detachments or a certain portion of a detachment may be employed for duty in ambulance trains.

This temporary care has been interpreted to mean *nursing* the sick and wounded; and as for the cooks' camp cooking, they are warned that "At their periodical practices, while the nurses practise nursing" (presumably roller bandaging) "and other work, they must cook, and the preparation of afternoon tea is not to be considered sufficient." All detachments are expected to learn simple military drill under strict military discipline.

The administrative medical officer in one county states that, "The knowledge of the members at best, was very elementary," and, the county director begs the members to strive for greater efficiency and among other things suggests to them, "To obtain permission to work in hospitals or with a district nurse, the hospital authorities and district nurses being asked to report periodically on the work and conduct of the members of the detachments." This note is added: "The experience thus gained is of great value and detachments which benefit in this manner should endeavor to recompense the institutions concerned with *suitable subscriptions and other help*."

Then an advanced course of lectures by the medical officer, followed by practical instruction given by the lady superintendent, is set forth and rewards for proficiency are offered, such as ribbons, badges, etc. Without doubt no pains have been spared by the lay organizers of these Voluntary Aid Detachments to render their members as efficient as possible, but they have entirely mis-interpreted the scope of their duties and still believe that their courses of concentrated knowledge and expert application of the roller bandage will make a nurse. They call these ignorant, unskilled women *nurses*, telling them they will have to *nurse* the sick and wounded, hence there is no wonder that they think they are quite equal to, if not better than, we silly, misguided folk who persist in believing that it takes three years of hard and varied work in the wards of a hospital before we consider ourselves capable of undertaking the care of seriously sick and wounded people. They ignore the fundamental fact that theory, even with practice on healthy boys, is totally different from real work of daily duty in a hospital.

The same wide interpretation seems to have been given to all the other instructions issued by the War Office in regard to requisitioning buildings, etc. For while the county organizers were preparing to requisition schools and any other public buildings they fancied, the War Office issued a notice that reference should be made to the local military authorities regarding buildings selected for Voluntary Aid purposes. In spite of this, in August last, when the war broke out, these Red Cross people promptly began their preparations and schools and other buildings were requisitioned all over the country, until the

War Office issued a notice definitely stating that schools were not to be taken and many already prepared had to be dismantled at great cost of time and money. In one town a secondary school is being used now, also an Eye Hospital, the Committee of which, when approached, hesitated, and were informed that if the building were not handed over willingly it would be commandeered, this high handed action being quite beyond their powers but the committee (all men) instead of challenging this statement, weakly gave way on condition that only when all other suitable places in the town were full should the eye patients be deprived of their hospital. The promise given, it was the first building to be used and that regardless of the fact that the school already mentioned had been ready with a staff waiting for weeks and longing for patients. It is reported that the school committee intimated that unless the building were soon used they would withdraw the consent.

The staff in the buildings mentioned consists of six or eight trained nurses and about 60 Red Cross members, the number of patients averaging about 60 or 70. One cottage hospital has two trained nurses and 15 Red Cross members with five patients. So they can make up in fuss what they lack in skill.

In many cases the men are sent straight from the front with only first dressings on and there have been quite a good proportion of serious operations. Doubtless to play the glorified game of Red Cross nursing was most fascinating with its drills, parades and field days before an admiring crowd, but when that game became grim and terrible reality the aspect was totally changed, *then* many realized that they were not strong enough for nursing or home duties were too pressing, and one lady of whom I heard, went away and left no address. At last an order was issued that no more resignations would be accepted without full and adequate reasons. Another changed her metier as her father thought it was most indecent for a young girl to undress a man so she was transferred to the kitchen.

In another case a superintendent called her detachment together to see how best she could arrange them, when one said that she could give two hours every evening, and another stated that she could only nurse sitting down!

All sorts and conditions of women flocked to ambulance and home nursing lectures on the outbreak of the war. One enterprising newspaper arranged them at different centers free. At the Red Cross Society's office people thronged and hundreds of nurses volunteered. It was stated that their credentials were verified by *a* matron but if her credentials were as casual as those who took the name of nurse lecturer,

it is no wonder that so many untrained women got to France and Belgium. It was something as follows, "Name, address, Are you trained? Yes," and upon that recommendation they sent her to someone who needed a lecturer. It is true they stated that they knew nothing about her, but how were they to know? That these emotional, sensation-seeking women are not out for help, i.e., to do what is needed, whether it be scrubbing, cooking or bed-making, is very evident, as the controlling idea seems to be to nurse the soldiers. This was aptly illustrated when a cook wished to enter some home nursing lectures; when it was suggested that she could join a V. A. Detachment as cook, she exclaimed: "Cook, I don't want to cook, I want to nurse the soldiers." It is not to do the best possible but to be in personal contact with the men, to be in the full flood of the lime-light, to act the guardian angel business, pillow smoothing, etc., that these people want; but to dress the awful wounds, they don't know how.

Yet they besieged the hospital committees for permission to enter the hospitals for a few weeks, "to see all the operations, dressings, etc.," while the regular probationers were to stand by and presumably clean up after them. Some hospital committees consulted their matrons and refused, all honor to them; but many passed resolutions that they should be allowed to enter and that, very often, without any reference to the matron at all. In one case where this was done, all the probationers threatened to resign if these Red Cross women were permitted to enter unless they took their share of the probationers' work with them. The committee was quite willing to accept their resignations until the nurses and sisters threatened to support them. Then and then only, was the resolution amended and for weeks these women over-ran the hospital.

The hospital committees are composed of medical men and prominent laymen. Very few women are appointed, although most of the work is done and much of the money is given by women. Therefore it is not incredible that doctors who are members of one of the closest of close corporations in England should be so thoroughly disloyal to the sister profession whose members have been so loyal to them, who have kept pace with their needs, improved and never spared themselves in order to be ever ready by their sides, and all this with very little encouragement except from a few individual doctors. Nurses have once again been betrayed by those on whom they relied for support in their struggle for their professional standards.

Now after several months one hears such praises of the coolness, nerve and the wonderful way these women work considering how little training they have had. I do not wish to belittle them, so far as I

understand they have shown their mettle under most trying conditions and in many cases have turned out to be really helpful. It is the whole pernicious system of brushing aside every educational ideal, of lowering the standard of work on the plea of national emergency simply because it is women's work and as such does not count, except as pawns in the game to be used or cast aside, to be lifted up or put down, as it may please the men who have brought the world to this dire state. How different it would have been if nursing were the prerogative of men! We have as an example of that the fact that no Belgian is to be employed if he takes the place of an Englishman, and when he is, to receive the same standard of wage as the trade unionists. I fancy the reason is not far to seek and can be summed up in one word, snobbery, and that of the worst type, which has made men willing to sacrifice their principles, their loyal co-workers, their hospital patients and last, but by no means least, the men who have gone forth and offered their lives for their country.

These V. A. Detachments are, for the most part, run by the most prominent and wealthy people of the neighborhood, many of the members are relations, friends or patients of the doctors and hospital committees and so, rather than be considered mean and disagreeable, which might mean social or financial loss, they have permitted these women to take the place of the trained nurses.

It is extraordinary the generations it takes men to learn that confusion results when they endeavor to control women's work. When one knows that men chiefly control these societies it is not surprising that so many society ladies and others with cash and influence were allowed at the front.

We have been refused state registration for the past ten years and these are the fruits. It is to be hoped that the anti-registrationists are content. Is it any wonder that we nurses are furious? First, that our brave men should be exploited by anybody rich enough to pay for the privilege, when they deserve the best care that education and training alone can give; and second, that the up-building of the education of nurses should be ruthlessly wrecked and cast aside at the first opportunity. That the good solid work which could have been rendered had we nurses been given that safe-guard for which we have worked and waited so long and which has been minimized by the selfish exploitation of men, at an epoch such as this, is heart-breaking. Had we been given registration and allowed to organize our profession on just lines, how different the war nursing would have been! Then there would have been a place for everyone and everyone in her place and untrained duchesses would not have been running ambulances while trained nurses waited for permission to nurse.